

ICANN grants .xxx but delays opening domain gates

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Computer user clicking a mouse. The group in charge of Internet addresses on Friday opened the door for websites ending with ".xxx" but delayed deciding whether to open the floodgates for other suffixes.

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The non-profit [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers](#) (ICANN) board voted to approve a petition to add .xxx to the list of "generic top level domains," those endings that include .com, .net, and .org.

However, resolutions considered by the board as its annual public meeting ended in San Francisco did not include whether to approve guidelines that would clear the way for essentially any [Internet address](#)

endings.

"We think we are pretty close to a workable policy," ICANN board chairman Peter Dengate Thrush told AFP. "It's all part of a mission to create competition, diversity and choice."

The ICANN board scheduled a special meeting in Singapore on June 20 to vote on confirming a guide book outlining the path aspiring domain operators would need to follow to use a suffix of their choosing.

In a potential sign of how the vote will turn out, ICANN has a celebration party planned for two days after the vote.

"We have come up with a program to close the process," Thrush told AFP after the board meeting in San Francisco.

"The major points left are not show-stopping questions of principle like a matter of a veto would have been if it had been suggested."

ICANN has spent years crafting a guide for approving applications for any suggested top level domains. Currently, the agency individually endorses domain name petitions.

The process encountered controversy after feedback in a government action committee included interest by the United States in veto power to preclude the creation of top level domains such as .gay that might be blocked in some countries.

The concern evidently was that countries blocking entire domains could lead to a balkanization of the Internet. The veto option was never proposed to the ICANN board by the government action committee, according to Thrush.

"It was a suggestion by one government that was never picked up by the others," he told AFP. "It never got out of the gossip phase."

Thrush dismissed the worry, reasoning that the adult content at issue is on the Internet regardless of whether a website address ends in .gay or one of the existing terms.

"The issue is the content, which is exactly the same," Thrush said. "It doesn't change if a website becomes .gay."

The few points left to be addressed include creating an "early warning system" to alert governments to new Internet address suffixes.

The ICANN board on Friday did approve a petition to operate an .xxx domain. The request had been rejected about five years ago and was reconsidered after an appeal.

Board member Rita Rodin Johnston prefaced her "yes" vote by quoting a US expression "caught between a rock and a hard place."

"I have never felt this so poignantly as with this .xxx decision," Johnston said.

Leaders of a Free Speech Coalition adult industry trade association had protested outside the ICANN meeting in opposition to creating a .xxx domain.

Studios were afraid they would be gouged for addresses in the domain to be operated by a privately-owned ICM Registry.

Another fear was that governments might create Internet versions of red light districts by forcing porn websites into a .xxx neighborhood that could then be monitored or blocked.

It is not mandatory for adult websites to use .xxx addresses, but studios will be under pressure to take up residence there to protect trademarks and avoid confusing people looking for them on the Internet.

"We are disappointed but we are not surprised by the [ICANN](#) board's decision," said FSC executive director Diane Duke. "They have disregarded overwhelming outpouring of opposition from the adult entertainment industry."

The FSC said it plans to fight to undo the decision and will advise studios not to get .xxx website addresses.

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